

Introduction



During the age of revolutions between 1760 and 1820, like many polities around the world, the Ottoman Empire experienced a series of institutional shakeups, political crises, popular insurrections, and different attempts at settlement. The old order was collapsing and possibilities for a new order emerged. Old institutions vanished. New institutions were tested and contested. Istanbul and cities and regions in the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Arab lands became political theaters where various actors struggled, collaborated, and competed over conflicting agendas and opposing interests. Examining some of these episodes, actors, and institutions, this book describes the transformation of the Ottoman Empire in this radical age.

In the historical literature, scholars of the Ottoman Empire have treated this period as the first major phase of Westernization and administrative reform under Sultan Selim III, which failed after turmoil struck in 1806 and 1808. According to the mainstream view, the delayed process of reform was restarted in the 1820s under Mahmud II.¹ My book shows that the history of the empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was far more complex than a story about failed Westernization. During this era, the Ottoman Empire offered a diverse repertoire of reform agendas, institutional restructuring, political discourse, and shifting coalitions, which cannot be reduced to conflicts between East and West, or old and new. These binaries are misleading for grasping the empire's multifaceted transformation. As we shall see, Western and Islamic patterns were intertwined, and there is no easy way to juxtapose them. Competition in this period took place, not only between the forces of old and new, but also and even more so, between different actors and agendas, many of which can be classified as new. This book presents a multilayered picture of the Ottoman Empire in the age of revolutions that goes beyond the existing binaries.

Examining the complex nature of the empire, I focus on various themes, institutions, and actors in the Ottoman center and the provinces. But this book also offers a broader argument. During this period, it shows that the

Ottoman polity experienced a turn from a vertical empire, in which the imperial elite sustained claims to power through a hierarchical system, to a horizontal and participatory empire, in which central and provincial actors combined to rule the empire together. Throughout the eighteenth century, through formal and informal contractual relations, provincial notables became consolidated as an essential component of state. Provincial communities formed new participatory mechanisms in public administration with their leaderships and became active participants in governance. These two structural changes were entangled with a reform program by the Ottoman imperial elite that pushed military and fiscal reorganization in the late eighteenth century. Reform came at the expense of various groups, especially the janissaries, a giant socio-military organization whose members had accumulated privileges and rights throughout the previous two centuries and had come to control public opinion in Istanbul and other cities. As a result, shifting coalitions and alliances among reformist elites, the janissaries, provincial notables, and communities appeared. These groups sought to control the state and negotiated different agendas of order, reform, and restoration. In 1808, an alliance of reformists and provincial notables came close to changing the imperial order for good into a partnership based on mutual trust, security of life and property, and military-administrative reform. But this attempt remained partial. The empire continued its journey to build a new order in the nineteenth century.

This experience was a result of institutional and political developments, as well as structural changes and contingencies that mirrored developments in other polities around the world. In the age of revolutions, other polities experienced similar crises, but employed different solutions. Some of these solutions succeeded, while others failed, or were reoriented and renegotiated. One response of the Ottoman elites to crisis was partnership. It helped the empire surmount challenges to its survival, while precluding dismemberment. Later the empire would take a different course, resuming a vertical structure. The Ottoman nineteenth century was to a large extent a story about state modernization, centralization, and bureaucratization. New practices and institutions that were tested during this period endured, however, and the legacy of actors who played a transformative role in the age of revolutions continued to shape Ottoman political culture throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through different channels. In this respect, the Ottoman experience in the age of revolutions was about different versions of top-down (or bureaucratic), contractual (or constitutional), and participatory (or democratic) experience, which should be understood in their political and institutional contexts and not simply as analogues of modern categories.

Each chapter in this book presents its own autonomous argument. Chapter 1, which is heavily based on the current scholarship in the field

of Ottoman history, offers a brief sketch of the Ottoman world in the eighteenth century and examines the New Order, a set of reform agendas proposed by the Ottoman imperial elite to resolve military and fiscal crises. Some of these reform agendas threatened segments of society, particularly those that endorsed the political claims of the janissaries. I argue that neither the New Order nor the opposition were monolithic groups, but rather large coalitions with branches in the provinces, diverse positions, and various interests. Chapters 2 and 3 shift our focus from the center to the provinces. In chapter 2, I discuss the nature of the relationship between the provincial elite and the empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I argue that throughout the eighteenth century, provincial notables came to act as fiscal, administrative, and military entrepreneurs who engaged in formal or informal contractual relations with the empire. These contractual relations were based on offers, acceptances, rejections, and counteroffers in a volatile arena, without the formal security of contract, status, property, and life. Some provincial notables joined the coalition of the New Order, while others acted with the opposition. The process gradually produced a new order of notables, by which the empire was run through partnerships between the central and provincial elites. Chapter 3 analyzes the ways in which provincial communities responded to changes in the eighteenth century. I argue that while the central administration was disconnected from the provinces and outsourced authority to provincial notables, provincial communities developed bottom-up mechanisms to manage fiscal and administrative matters under the supervision of elected or communally nominated notables. Instead of reversing this participatory and electoral process and launching a centralizing policy, the central administration institutionalized bottom-up collective actions. In the new provincial order, collective action became a source of legitimacy. Provincial communities were becoming political actors—sometimes at expense of notables—in governance.

The book's first three chapters thus present analytical and thematic discussions of the institutional transformation of the Ottoman order (or orders) and how the imperial elite, notables, and communities experienced and shaped this transformation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chapter 4 shifts to a narrative history of the events that took place between August 1806 and November 1808. Stories from previous chapters converge in chapter 4, where I focus on the popular opposition to the New Order led by the janissaries, shifting coalitions between provincial and imperial elites, growing politicization of Ottoman communities, and the interimperial story of the Napoleonic wars and wartime diplomacy. This narrative style enables me to highlight a process that consisted of multiple episodes, contingencies, shifting

alliances, and dead ends. Confronted with a janissary-led popular revolt in 1807, the New Order collapsed and the prior order was restored. This triggered a political coalition between the elites of the New Order and a group of provincial notables for a coup d'état to restore the New Order. This coalition manifested itself in a constitutional synthesis of the New Order and the order of notables, embodied in a document called the Deed of Alliance, which envisioned a new imperial regime based on partnership, security, stability (rather than volatility), and trust among elites. Chapter 5 presents a textual analysis of the Deed of Alliance. Close reading of the text, combined with commentary, is followed by a discussion of the document's reception in modern history and its place among other constitutional texts from the age of revolutions.

Partners of the Empire thus operates on several levels. While supporting its overall argument, each chapter tackles a number of specific issues, such as military-fiscal reform, provincial notables and their political and economic power, communities and collective action, the politicization of the masses and urban riots, the making of a constitutional document in Ottoman political culture, and war and diplomacy in the age of revolutions. Interconnected themes, episodes, and individuals emerge in each chapter despite the diversity of topics and genres. Readers will, for example, encounter and reencounter the city of Ruse, the events of 1807 and 1808, life-term contracts or apportionment, the reformist sultan Selim III, the leading provincial notable Mustafa Bayraktar, and the pro-New Order preacher Ubeydullâh Kuşmânî.

Since *Partners of the Empire* engages with diverse questions and themes in many locations, it takes advantage of a wide array of sources in various genres and languages. In addition to growing scholarship in different languages on the period, documents from local and central Ottoman archives in Turkey and Bulgaria, some published but most unpublished, provide the bulk of source material for my story. I also rely heavily on narrative sources, chronicles, and histories, as well as on European (French, Austrian, British, and Russian) diplomatic archival sources. Keeping in mind the focus and length of the book, I mention only a limited number of the many sources I have gathered and studied over the years. At several points, I discuss the nature of my primary sources.

A PROGRESSION OF REVOLUTIONS OR AN AGE OF PLURAL REVOLUTIONS?

Readers will gather from the title of this book that one of my objectives is to place the Ottoman Empire in the age of revolutions. Throughout my story, I explore how Ottoman history contributes to our understanding

of that age as a global phenomenon, and in turn, how our discussions of the age of revolutions contribute to our understating of the role in it of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire experienced challenges that were common to many polities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ottoman responses sometimes resembled events in other parts of the world, but in other cases did not. My main objective is not to place the Ottoman Empire apologetically in the framework of the established historiography of the American and French political revolutions and the British Industrial Revolution without taking historical specificities into consideration. Rather, I understand the Ottoman experience in the age of revolutions in its own way and on its own terms. But this book also conceives a broader framework for the age of revolutions, in which episodes, patterns, and themes in North America, Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire; but also in Haiti, Russia, Iran, Burma, Mexico, and other regions shared a common global experience. Thus, events in disparate places had similar, comparable, and commensurable characteristics, which were, moreover, interconnected.

R. R. Palmer's path-breaking 1959 book *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* presented the revolutionary period as transnational.² Palmer explored connected phenomena in Europe and the Atlantic world, suggesting that the boundaries of democratic revolutions extended to Poland, but not beyond. Many historians, following Palmer, have focused on a transnational revolutionary age, examining developments from Central Europe to the Americas. Historians of the Muslim world have only contributed to this oversight. Bernard Lewis, in his seminal works on the impact (or lack of impact) of the French Revolution on the Ottoman Empire, argued that the ideas of the French Revolution impinged on the empire but collided with civilizational walls that divided Islam from the West.³ As I mentioned earlier, this period, according to many historians, was when the seeds of Westernization were sowed. According to this narrative, Ottoman Westernization was military and administrative, not social or democratic. Ottoman intellectuals were thus mostly indifferent to the French Revolution, according to Lewis.

In this narrative, the Ottoman Empire makes a brief appearance in the age of revolutions during Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt from 1798 to 1799. Many historians consider this Napoleonic moment the beginning of the "modern" period in the Middle East. This short interval triggered unexpected developments in Egypt that resulted in the rise of Muhammad Ali and his radical transformation of Egypt in the early nineteenth century. In this account, the Ottoman Empire, including Egypt, constituted another world, distinct from Europe's revolutionary change. The top-down characteristics of the modernization reforms of the Ottoman sultans in the Balkans and Anatolia, or Muhammad Ali in Egypt, were

not compatible with the revolutionary era's democratic ideas and bottom-up movements.

The main impact of the American and French revolutions on Ottoman political culture was that it gave rise to the nationalism of Christian Balkan peoples. Starting with the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s, Balkan nations under the influence of revolutionary ideas separated themselves from the Ottoman Empire. According to this argument, the French Revolution's only effect on Muslims was the rise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the Young Turks, the Ottoman constitutionalists, in opposition to the despotism of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Their constitutional revolution in 1908, and revolution in Iran in 1906, were Muslim versions of the French Revolution, ending sultanic despotism. Revolution thus finally arrived in the Ottoman lands 119 years after the revolutionary events of 1789 in France. Republicanism came even later, with the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, which relegated the Ottoman Empire to the dustbin of history.⁴

This narrative was based on a peculiar version of world history, which depicted revolutionary changes as the progression of a certain universalist framework, shaped by the Enlightenment, that promoted the rights of the individual, the market, and public sovereignty against the privileges of the old order. This progression began with the American and French revolutions and the fall of the ancien régime in France in the late eighteenth century (or, for some historians, with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England). Revolutionary currents thus moved across the earth's surface, region by region, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arriving in the Ottoman Empire after a century's delay. The Marxist version of this global narrative of revolutionary progress argued that the journey of revolutions was radicalized by the Russian Revolution of 1917, marking an ontological shift from bourgeois to proletarian. This process continued with the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, ending the Qing Empire, followed in 1949 by the Chinese Communist Revolution. Other versions of revolutions continued to spread throughout the world, exploding at different times with different characteristics in India (1947), Egypt (1952), Algeria (1954), Zanzibar (1964), Iran (1979), Eastern Europe (1989), and again in Egypt (2011), among others.⁵

As some have suggested, the late eighteenth-century revolutions never came to an end. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even the current century, have witnessed revolutions of different types, all of which had roots in late eighteenth-century Europe and America to some extent. As Keith Baker argues, the French Revolution changed the meaning of the word *révolution* from *any* abrupt change to *a particular type* of abrupt change, with a universal and world-historical script expected and followed in different corners of the world. As David Armitage shows,

after the American Revolution, the idea of national sovereignty became contagious, so that every nineteenth- and twentieth-century collective ethno-national group was expected to declare it.⁶ But this revolutionary progressionism should not prevent us from asking whether in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there existed a broader context for abrupt, dramatic institutional change and deliberative searches to form new orders with wider social bases. The American and French cases were perhaps only two versions of such episodes that unfolded in different corners of the world.

Instead of engaging with the global history of revolutionary progression from advanced to “late” societies, some historians have recently generated another debate on the concurrent history of revolutions on a global scale in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Franco Venturi planted the seeds of contemporary discussions of the global age of revolutions in his massive survey, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768–1776* (1979).⁷ Venturi suggests that the radical changes that ended the old order first appeared, not in western Europe, but further east, on the Ottoman-Russian-Polish frontiers in the entangled Hellenic, Slavic, and Islamic cultural zones. In relocating the roots of the revolutionary age from west to east, Venturi masterfully illustrates that connections between Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and Poland were so profound and lively in the late eighteenth century that it is impossible to write their histories on separate pages.

Recently, several historians have proposed a wider scope of analysis and have explored the notion of a global or plural age of revolutions.⁸ In *The Birth of the Modern World* (2004), C. A. Bayly provides a map of converging revolutions occurring in different parts of the world, from Burma to Haiti and from the 1760s to the 1820s. Some of these revolutions were connected by similar political or philosophical agendas and variations of Enlightenment. But most were not. Each political, legal, and intellectual culture responded to similar crises in its own way. According to Bayly, however, at some level these responses—occurring in the same stormy global context—were connected, comparable, and commensurable. A historian working on a specific case by considering broader patterns, dynamics, and perceptions must thus confront these generalities.⁹

What exactly were these global patterns, generalities, and connections? In the eighteenth century, global interactions increased as a result of intensifying mobility and the increasing circulation of commodities and ideas through trade networks and diaspora communities. However, after the consolidation of colonial empires, especially the British and French, interstate (interimperial) competition reached a global scale, which was responsible, to some extent, for a “world war” between 1756 and 1763

in many corners of the world. Other empires also deepened and expanded their rule. Russian power reached inner and central Asia. The Qing Empire moved westward and swallowed Xingjian, Tibet, and Mongolia. The Spanish Empire reestablished itself in Latin America and the Philippines. The Ottoman Empire conquered Crete, reconquered the Peloponnese, and captured Caucasia, formerly part of Safavid Iran. Under Nader Shah, Iran expanded toward India. At the same time, extinction threatened many polities. The Mughal Empire was stuck between Iran and the British and French empires and their proxies. Poland disappeared after its partition by Russia, Austria, and Prussia. Ottoman expansion in the early eighteenth century was dramatically curtailed by Russia, which moved toward Ottoman-dominated lands bordering on the northern Black Sea and annexed Crimea.

Imperial expansion, long-distance military campaigns, and prolonged wars led to a dramatic increase in the need for military reform, including expensive military technologies and new organizational patterns for disciplined and drilled standing armies. Soaring military expenditures, wars, and constant military reorganization pushed states to extract more resources from their people, provinces, or colonies. These pressures led to fiscal reforms and the introduction of new financial instruments for internal and external borrowing. Military and fiscal reform often brought with it new reform agendas to discipline urban and rural populations or social reforms to curb different forms of opposition. Various reform agendas were disseminated not only through publications and trade networks, but also by military and fiscal experts who sought employment in foreign countries.

Reform agendas triggered a wide range of responses and unrest, sparking riots and rebellions in many places. Separatist movements were sometimes successful, but also triggered new expansions and consolidations of state rule or imperial control. Amid the turmoil, new possibilities for negotiations and coalitions between ruling elites and other groups emerged. Some coalitions that controlled the state apparatus expanded through co-optation, while others shrank through new exclusions. These negotiations and coalitions gave birth to unprecedented settlements and ways of envisioning the political order by reconfiguring rights and privileges. Ideas and attempts to change the order triggered codifications. The state was both successful and unsuccessful in dealing with opposition. In different regions, these developments brought about profound institutional changes that reconfigured everything from the social order to the meaning of life, in a process we generically call “revolution.”¹⁰

Focusing on the Ottoman context, this book examines several of these themes and episodes that contribute to a comparative history of crisis, reform, and revolution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

My purpose is to show how Ottoman political culture produced possibilities for reform of the empire in an epoch when reform was increasingly understood as inevitable, and how various groups—with their own agendas, priorities, and calculations—challenged or became part of reform politics. The book also highlights historical connections, since most of these episodes took place, not in an isolated Ottoman theater, but as an integrated part of Eurasian politics, economies, and war. In this period, the internal and external affairs of the state were not clearly separated, sovereignty and territoriality were constantly renegotiated, and national or royal loyalties split and shifted. Ambitious projects for regime change were on the table.

Comparative and connected history can help us identify and analyze both similarities and differences, as well as points of convergence and divergence. Although this book does not present a particular argument about the Ottoman Empire's convergence with or divergence from Europe, it can contribute to these discussions. It examines various institutions and practices that are crucial to understanding political and economic performance, such as contracts, negotiations, participation, trust and accumulation of wealth, risk and volatility, and order and violence. These categories of analysis help us understand the comparative history of economic development and institutional transformation. Debates about the institutional origins, not only of development and underdevelopment, but of authoritarianism and democracy in the West, the Islamic World, and East Asia are put in comparative perspective by my contention that during the age of revolutions, the Ottoman Empire tested shifting from a vertical to a horizontal state, and from a volatile hierarchical order to a stable order of partnership and participation.¹¹

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF OTTOMAN DECLINE, CRISIS, AND REFORM

The history of the Ottoman Empire was long told in terms of its fifteenth-century rise, sixteenth-century grandeur, seventeenth-century stagnation, eighteenth-century decline, and (unsuccessful) nineteenth-century reform, followed by its collapse in the early twentieth century. In this Gibbonian rise-and-decline narrative, the period between 1770 and 1820 was presented as an initial attempt and failure at Westernization and the era of one of the Ottoman Empire's worst crises before World War I. Efforts at reform and Westernization were curbed by various powers, first by the janissaries, acting in conjunction with conservative forces such as the ulema (Islamic scholarly class), and to a certain extent by provincial notables, who represented a centrifugal reactionary and feudal power. Conventional historical discourse, which emerged during nineteenth-century

bureaucratic modernization and twentieth-century nation-state building, failed to grasp the complexities of this earlier period of crisis. For Turkish historiography, the janissaries and the coalition of provincial notables targeted the modernizing state. In Balkan and Arab historiography, provincial notables and janissaries tightened the Ottoman-Turkish yoke, operating against local people according to the tyrannical and arbitrary rules of a feudal order. Paradoxically, the rule of the notables was instrumental in fostering national awaking, since under their rule, the provinces were separated from the Ottoman state, preparing the ground for the national movements and nation-building processes that followed.¹²

Since the mid 1960s, historians have revised this “decline and breakdown” narrative from many perspectives. Albert Hourani’s work on the politics of notables opened new avenues for studies of the provincial elite. Hourani depicted notables in the Arab lands, not as feudal oppressors, but as local elites who gave voice to the interests of local people against the empire, inasmuch as they were incorporated into local politics and the economy.¹³ Halil İnalcık, who modified his work on imperial decline from the 1970s, argued that the military and fiscal transformation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave birth to new provincial elites who promoted a process of decentralization, but not disintegration, of the empire.¹⁴ Avdo Sućeska illustrated how in the eighteenth-century Balkans, local communities and notables were involved in reciprocal relationships through various legal and fiscal instruments.¹⁵ These three pioneering historians, while revising the old narrative, show that the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not a period of total breakdown for the Ottoman Empire, but of multifaceted transformation that introduced new actors, institutions, and relationships.

After the 1970s, studies of the Ottoman long eighteenth century followed three tracks: (i) regional studies, (ii) military and fiscal transformation, and (iii) political culture and the politics of reform. Since the 1980s, writings on regional settings, families, and economies have enriched the perspectives introduced by Hourani, İnalcık, and Sućeska. A vast literature has emerged on Arab,¹⁶ Anatolian,¹⁷ Balkan,¹⁸ and Greek¹⁹ provincial centers, notable families, and networks in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, the imperial context is not adequately problematized in these studies, and the modern boundaries of post-Ottoman countries and divisions between the geographical zones of the Middle East, Anatolia, and the Balkans are assumed. Recent writings on central Anatolia, Mosul, Jabal, Nablus, Egypt, and Cyprus illustrate the limits of Ottoman imperial control, the consolidation of regional political economies and their connections to interimperial economic zones, and the transformative role played by provincial notables in provincial societies as new centers of the empire.²⁰ While focusing on the local level,

these scholars problematize local, regional, imperial, and global perspectives, showing their intersections and interactions through various relationships and institutions.

Beginning in the 1980s, a number of studies have examined the institutional transformation of the Ottoman polity from a tributary empire to a fiscal-military state with far-reaching financial and administrative institutions. Meticulous work on the expansion of tax-farming as the dominant fiscal mechanism,²¹ research on its structural implications in the rural economy,²² and studies of the new fiscal regime under the Ottoman New Order²³ were further developed by various historians. These scholars suggest that new fiscal transformation based on outsourcing provincial units and internal borrowing increased private entrepreneurial attitudes and nexuses that fostered imperial integration through fiscal entrepreneurs.²⁴ Recent studies of macroeconomic performance in the Ottoman world and the gradual appearance of the market economy in the eighteenth century have not only rescued economic analysis from the framework of fiscal history, but have also qualified and quantified the argument that the eighteenth century was not a period of economic decline.²⁵ Despite the growing literature on Ottoman fiscal institutions and economic performance in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, the majority of these studies are not interconnected with political developments, but operate in the relatively isolated fields of fiscal and economic history.

Other scholars have shown interest in the transformation of political culture and public life in the Ottoman world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The notion that these two centuries should be understood, not in terms of structural decline, but rather in terms of transformation, with losers and winners who endorsed different political agendas and historical discourses, has recently gained acceptance.²⁶ Historians have recently responded to Cemal Kafadar's invitation to understand the janissary rebellions as social movements that resulted from the new forms of sociability in public life, the politicization of urban communities, and their integration into economic life.²⁷ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some scholars argue, the Ottoman Empire produced a new political society, autonomous from the dynasty and the central imperial establishment, through new economic and political claims that signified a second phase of the Ottoman Empire. Earlier studies of the Ottoman reforms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which analyzed the politics of reform as a battle between old and new and East and West,²⁸ had already undergone reevaluation by scholars who provided a more intricate picture of Ottoman reform and Westernization. Specifically, these historians have uncovered agendas mobilized by internal dynamics and complex cultural encounters and social movements.²⁹ A new generation has shown that the New Order's reforms amounted to much

more than military reorganization. Instead, these scholars have illustrated that the New Order was a set of agendas with political and social components that became a disciplinary mechanism to reshape the social order in the early nineteenth-century Ottoman world.³⁰ Studies on how various public opposition movements and moral economies in the urban space reacted to disciplinary reform politics throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries support this argument.³¹

While engaging in dialogue with these evolving literatures, *Partners of the Empire* departs from them on methodological matters and in terms of focus and scale. First, it examines themes and problems—generally treated as separate phenomena by scholars in the field—in an integrated format, around a process: crisis, transformation, reform, revolution, and settlement in the Ottoman Empire in the age of revolutions. Themes such as fiscal transformation, military reform, the rise of provincial notables, the consolidation of collective action and public opinion, political radicalism and violence, and constitutional settlements are, I argue, analytical components of the same accelerated transformation. Second, the level of analysis in this book is the empire, rather than a particular region or the transformation of central government. Therefore, I shift the focus, by zooming out and zooming in, from the provincial level to the regional, from the regional to the imperial, from the imperial level to the theater of Istanbul, and from there on to the global politics of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic period.

In this respect, I analyze connections as well as autonomous developments and the local, imperial, and interimperial contexts. Clearly, I am unable to focus on every region and event. Rather, I have chosen to represent specific cases, some of which are representative, and others unique, and examine these moments in different regions in comparative fashion. I do not dismiss the importance of local and regional realities. Rather, I propose looking at these local realities in tandem with the imperial and interimperial contexts to examine how various levels of activity interacted with one another. By doing so, I suggest that the relationship between the empire and the provinces is not a binary story about center and periphery. In my account, the Ottoman Empire appears as a relatively integrated unit, entangled through ties, institutions, and relationships that were continuously renegotiated by many actors. Integration was neither necessarily imposed by the center nor fully controlled by it.

Recently, two books have set new agendas for the transformation of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In *The Second Ottoman Empire* (2010), Baki Tezcan argues that a new political society came into being as a result of early seventeenth-century social and political crisis. Constant struggles among the old imperial elite and new social and political forces, including janissary affiliates and the learned,

gave birth to a strong society positioned against the conventional elites of the central state and maintaining claims to economic resources and political rights as well as new cultural and legal orientations. Tezcan calls this process “proto-democratization.” It gradually changed the institutional structure of the empire; hence, Tezcan argues, we can refer to the new regime as the Second Empire. The eighteenth century was more or less a continuation of the Second Empire with some new actors, namely, provincial notables, who became empowered and enriched with the fiscal institutions of the Second Empire.³²

In *Empire of Difference* (2008), Karen Barkey proposes a comprehensive framework for the Ottoman imperial system and its transformation.³³ In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Barkey argues, two major developments occurred: “the empowerment of the political” and the consolidation of networking society. The former pertains to the politicization of urban space through janissary-led public dissent, while the latter refers to the rise of fiscal nexuses, based on fiscal contracts and tax-farming. In Barkey’s analysis, neither trend, each of which developed separately from the other, became a viable alternative to Ottoman modernization. Eventually, in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman state was able to suppress dissent and eliminate networking society through centralizing policies and bureaucratic modernization.

Although *Partners of the Empire* very much shares the general arguments of Tezcan and Barkey, it offers a different take. I agree with Tezcan and Barkey that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a profound transformation in the empire. New actors came into being from different segments of the Ottoman society in the center and provinces. They developed new claims on economic resources and political life. Meanwhile, the central organization, based on a top-down hierarchy of the servants of the state and sultanate, if not marginalized, came to terms with new actors, realities, and institutions. The Ottoman state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had more *partners* than the Ottoman state in the sixteenth century both in the center and provinces. However, this “new” social and political order, gradually developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and based on an “empowered political” and “network society,” did not bring long-term stability. Urban riots, regional rebellions, peasant unrest, violence committed by state agents or local notables, massive confiscations, and the elimination of different groups after a certain time of wealth accumulation were natural components of this period. In fact, the imperial elites and growing fiscal bureaucracy, janissary affiliates, enriched and empowered provincial notables, the learned, and different religious groups criticizing the ruling elite did not agree on a persistent settlement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet the empire did not collapse and the contained

volatile system created its own dynamic of endurance and balance of power among the power groups. The unbearable crisis came from the outside. The relatively stable period between 1730 and 1768 ended with the Ottoman-Russian war of 1768–74. The war left the Ottoman Empire with an immense military and fiscal crisis, which had a potential to transform the crisis of existence. In the late eighteenth century, the Second Empire, as Tezcan calls it, was coming to an end, having sustained a crisis similar to what other early modern polities experienced.

In the late eighteenth century, although there was no agreement in Ottoman political society about the nature of reform, there was consensus that some sort of reform was inevitable. Yet there were many questions to be answered. Who would be the partners of reform? Who would be the members of the alliance? Who would be included in or excluded from the new order? Would the janissaries intend to be part of the process, and, if not, were they to be ignored or sacrificed? Would provincial notables be in or out? If they were to be included, what role would they play in the new order? Would they be free contractors or servants of the state? What would their relationship to provincial communities look like? Would state officials closely administer the provincial communities as much as possible, or would provincial notables take on this task? Or would the communities govern themselves through elected leaders? If so, then, how would the state monitor the provinces? What kind of deal should the empire conclude with the actors to keep them loyal or at least to prevent them from menacing peace and integration? All these questions were on the table in the late eighteenth century, and there were no simple answers. Similar queries came from janissaries, provincial notables, and leading members of the communities who knew that reform was inevitable and that they would be smart to develop strategies to decide under what conditions they would be a part of reform coalition or against it.

This book argues that in the late eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire tested three competing alternatives to reform the imperial order and preserve a relatively integrated and operational system. First, there was a reform agenda that was based on top-down reorganization through bureaucratic and military centralization and disciplining the military, and gradually society. I call this alternative “the new order of empire.” The second alternative was based on a partnership between imperial and provincial elites, not only through fiscal relationships, but also through political and constitutional ties. I call this alternative “the order of notables.” The third alternative was based on bottom-up mechanisms, such as collective participation in fiscal and administrative management, public opinion, and electoral processes, which I call “the order of communities.” These alternatives were all enmeshed in the larger agenda of reform. The three orders—horizontal based on partnership, top-down

based on military-bureaucratic hierarchy, and bottom-up based on public opinion—echoed the aristocratic, monarchic, and democratic forms in the ideal terms of classical political philosophy. In the age of revolutions, the Ottoman Empire tried and tested different combinations of these three alternatives. In 1808, when my story culminates, partnership between central and provincial elites triumphed when it came to military reform and new mechanisms of trust and security against volatility. Hence the title of my book: *Partners of the Empire*.